The nature of Chriſtian Liberty explained, the violations of it marked, and the weapons by which it ought to be defended pointed out,

IN A

SERMON,

Delivered before the Reverend Synod of Relief, in the Relief Church, Edinburgh, May 28. 1776.

By MICHAEL BOSTON,

Late Miniſter of the Proteſtant Diſſenting Congregation in Alnwick, Northumberland,

Now Paſtor of the Relief Church, Falkirk.

In neceſſariis Unitas,
In non neceſſariis Libertas,
In utriſque Charitas.

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MDCCLXXVII.

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TO

The PATRONS of the right of PRIVATE JUDGEMENT,

IN OPPOSITION TO

The lawleſs Depredations of BIGOTRY,

ON THE ONE HAND,

AND TO

The FRIENDS of CHRISTIAN LIBERTY,

IN OPPOSITION TO

The wanton Incroachments of LICENTIOUSNESS,

ON THE OTHER,

The following DISCOURSE is,

As a Mite thrown into their Treaſury,

Reſpectfully dedicated,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

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Most HUMBLY dedicated,

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A

SERMON.

GAL. v. 1.

Stand faſt, therefore, in the liberty where-with Chriſt hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bond-age.

IT is the peculiar glory, and diſtin-guiſhing excellency, of the religion of Jeſus, that it builds upon an immove-able baſis, and ſecures to every individual the rights of conſcience and private judge-ment. This ſeems to be a privilege com-petent to us as men; and therefore the Redeemer hath inveſted us with it as Chriſtians. Every ſpecies of falſe religion is, in its genius and tendency, hoſtile to

this glorious branch of Chriſtian liberty. The reaſon is obvious: As all falſe and ſophiſticated religions are deſtitute of evidence to command the aſſent of the underſtanding, as well as of intrinſic excellency to captivate the heart, they muſt be propagated by violence, or external force: their ſucceſs, therefore, would be effectually marred, if this unalienable right of mankind were either acknowledged as due, or allowed to individuals. The hiſtory of the Mahometan and Popiſh religions is a ſufficient proof of the truth of this remark. The falſe Prophet of the Eaſt propagated his religion by external force, which terminated in the deſtruction of the rights of conſcience; and the ghoſtly Father of Rome roſe to the zenith of his glory, and reached the ſummit of his exorbitant power, by the ſame unhallowed means.

It is the defence of this and all the other branches of our Chriſtian liberty, that the apoſtle inculcates upon the Galatians in the text. This exhortation was naturally introduced by this circumſtance: Some Judaizing zealots having found their way into the Galatian church, attempted

to

to vilify the character of the apoſtle, and to ſubvert his doctrine of juſtification through the righteouſneſs of Chriſt, by ſuperadding the works of the law as neceſſary for that purpoſe. This perverſion of the apoſtolic doctrine would have entangled the Chriſtians in another galling yoke of bondage, and conſequently deſtroyed a valuable and eſſential branch of that liberty wherewith their divine Maſter had made them free. Againſt this doctrine, ſo ſubverſive of the goſpel-ſcheme of juſtification, and ſo inimical to the liberty of Chriſtians, the apoſtle, ever watchful over the purity of *the faith once delivered to the ſaints*, employs his inſpired pen; and in the text he calls upon the Galatians to unite their efforts with his to preſerve this valuable branch of their Chriſtian liberty againſt ſuch a dangerous invaſion of it: *Stand faſt, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Chriſt hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*

Theſe words naturally divide themſelves into the following parts.

Firſt, The apoſtle ſpecifies the privilege of the Galatians, to wit, Liberty; — a

principal branch of which, and to which he particularly alludes, was a freedom from the irkſome and galling yoke of Jewiſh ceremonies.

Secondly, He expreſſes their duty in conſequence of being inveſted with this liberty, namely, to aſſert and maintain it with reſolution and fortitude, amid the attempts of enemies to raviſh it from them; and, in a word, to ſtand faſt in it undaunted, as ſoldiers do in their ranks on the field of battle; which ſome think the original word intimates *.

Though the particular branch of Chriſtian liberty which the apoſtle here exhorts the Galatians to ſtand faſt in, is (as has been obſerved) their freedom from the ceremonies of the Jewiſh law; yet it will not (I preſume) be offering violence to his meaning, to conſider the words as containing an exhortation to Chriſtians to ſtand faſt in their Chriſtian liberty in general, of which that branch alluded to in our text is a valuable part. For, ſurely, if it is our duty to aſſert and maintain

* Vid. Leigh's *Critica Sacra*, on the word στήκω.

one

one particular branch of Chriſtian liberty, it is equally our duty to ſtand forth in defence of that liberty in general, and in all its parts.

It is in this point of view that I ſhall beg leave, with the indulgence of you, my Reverend Fathers and Brethren, to conſider the text in the following diſcourſe; in which I ſhall attempt, under the auſpices of Heaven,

FIRST, To make a few remarks upon that liberty wherewith Chriſt, the ſole head of the church, hath inveſted every Chriſtian.

SECONDLY, To ſhew what may be ſuppoſed a violation or infringement of this liberty.

THIRDLY, To point out the weapons by which it ought to be defended.

FIRST, The object of the firſt department of the diſcourſe is, to make a few remarks upon that liberty wherewith Chriſt hath inveſted every Chriſtian.

1. Chriſtian liberty does not conſiſt in a liberty to diſpenſe with, add to, or alter, any of the laws of Chriſt.

We never can acquire juſt notions of Chri-

Chriſtian liberty, unleſs we conſider particularly wherein it conſiſts; nor, on the other hand, can this precious jewel be preſerved from abuſe and perverſion, without ſpecifying what it is not. To ſuppoſe that it conſiſts in a liberty to diſpenſe occaſionally with any of the laws of Chriſt, would be to annihilate theſe laws, to diſſolve their obligations, and to mar their deſign and utility altogether. The laws of Chriſt, as they are a tranſcript of his all-perfect nature, and enjoin and forbid nothing but what is morally good or bad, ſo every creature is bound to obey them at all times, and in every place, as well on account of their own intrinſic excellency, as of the ſovereign authority of their illuſtrious Author. To diſpenſe, then, with any of theſe laws, or to ſay that any duty which they recommend is only of occaſional obligation, is not Chriſtian liberty, but an execrable proſtitution of it, and the moſt wanton licentiouſneſs.

Neither does Chriſtian liberty conſiſt in a liberty to add to the laws of Chriſt; becauſe, as they are perfect in all their parts, they are incapable of addition. Thoſe, therefore, who add to the laws

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of Chriſt, and would force upon men any human ordinance as an inſtitution of his, preſumptuouſly derogate from his perfect wiſdom, and impiouſly pervert the liberty he hath bequeathed to his church.

Add to this, that Chriſtian liberty does not conſiſt in a liberty to alter any of the laws of Chriſt. To alter the laws of Chriſt, is as impious as to diſpenſe with, or add to them, and is equally inconſiſtent with the genius of true Chriſtian liberty; becauſe, as theſe laws are complete in themſelves, ſuited to every caſe, and calculated to anſwer all purpoſes, they need no alteration, and are incapable of it. From this reaſoning, then, it will appear, that the liberty of the Chriſtian does not conſiſt in a liberty of diſpenſing with, adding to, or altering, any of the laws of Chriſt. To diſpenſe with them occaſionally, is to ſuppoſe, that they are not of perpetual obligation; to add to them, implies, that they are incomplete; and to alter them, is to ſay, that they are imperfect. I therefore obſerve,

2. That true Chriſtian liberty conſiſts in that right which every man has to judge for himſelf in matters of religion.

The goſpel is addreſſed to every individual as ſuch. It accoſts him in his private capacity. It ſpeaks to him as poſſeſſed of an immortal ſpirit, which muſt either be happy or miſerable in the eternal world; and therefore, in conſequence of this, a right to judge for himſelf in matters of religion is his undiſputable, his unalienable privilege. Hence it is, that the Divine Author of our religion exhorts his diſciples, neither to allow themſelves to be called Rabbi *, nor to call any man Father, upon the earth †. Though divinely inſpired, they were not to aſſume to themſelves an authoritative power of preſcribing in religious matters to others. This is the prerogative of him only who is their Maſter, even Chriſt. It was their province only, as the ambaſſadors of Chriſt, to publiſh and declare to mankind the truth, as he had revealed it to them; and, by argument and perſuaſion, to open their underſtandings for the reception of it. On the other hand, he commands them, not to call any man their father upon the earth, not to allow any man to dic-

* Matth. xxiii. 8. † Matth. xxiii. 9.

tate

tate to them in matters of faith, nor tamely to make a compliment to any of that liberty with which he, as the Lord of the conſcience, had inveſted them; becauſe this would be relinquiſhing the prerogative of Chriſt, and ſubſtituting another in his place. Both theſe dangerous extremes were to be carefully avoided; becauſe the one ſubſtitutes the apoſtles in the place of Chriſt, and the other makes any man the *Lord Keeper* of our faith on whom we are pleaſed to confer that dignity. Upon the ſame principle does the Apoſtle Paul reaſon, when he ſo warmly expoſtulates with the members of the Chriſtian church at Rome as to the impropriety of their judging one another: "But "why doſt thou judge thy brother? or "why doſt thou ſet at nought thy bro-"ther? For we ſhall all ſtand before the "judgement-ſeat of Chriſt *." The revelation of the goſpel was already given to them, together with a right to each man to judge for himſelf, as to the principles taught, and the duties inculcated, in that revelation: at the ſame time Chriſt had

* Rom. xiv. 10.

reſerved to himſelf the ſole power of judging of their faith and practice; and, conſequently, if one man preſumed to judge for his brother in religious matters, he impiouſly encroached upon the prerogative of Chriſt, and arrogantly infringed that liberty wherewith he had made every individual among them free.

But this is not all. As every man, becauſe the goſpel addreſſes him as an *individual*, has an unalienable right to judge for himſelf in religious matters; ſo he derives that right from this circumſtance, that he is anſwerable to God as an *individual* at laſt. No man can appear before God by proxy. He cannot anſwer to the Judge of all the earth by the mouth of another. As he is to anſwer for himſelf, he ought to judge for himſelf; and if any man is to judge for him, it follows, that that man ſhould, and muſt, anſwer for him too: for if his faith is erroneous, the man himſelf is not ſo much to be blamed for it, as he who was ſo complaiſant as to dictate it to him.

It was upon this radical principle of goſpel-liberty that the firſt Proteſtants ſet out

out *. It is upon the ſame principle that their cauſe and conduct can only be vindicated: for if the right of private judgement be only a pretended or uſurped right, then

* Soon after the doctrines of Luther had begun to diffuſe their benign influence through Germany, and to diſturb the peace of the Holy Father at Rome, the Emperor Charles V. that he might not diſpleaſe Leo X. who then filled the infallible chair, reſolved that Luther ſhould be ſummoned before the council which was to be aſſembled at Worms in the year 1521, and that his cauſe ſhould there be publicly heard. Luther accordingly appeared, and defended his cauſe before this auguſt aſſembly, with that undaunted heroiſm, and that undiſturbed preſence of mind, which a full conviction of the truth can only inſpire. After his departure, however, a ſentence was pronounced by his frontleſs judges, proſcribing him as an heretic, and prohibiting all perſons, under the ſevereſt penalties, either to read his books, or to receive and protect him. In the year 1529, at a diet of the princes of the Germanic empire held at *Spires*, it was decreed, by the majority there preſent, "That in thoſe places where the "edict of *Worms* had been received, it ſhould be "lawful for no one to change his religion; that in "thoſe places where the new religion (i. e. the Lu-"theran) was exerciſed, it ſhould be maintained, "till the meeting of a council, if the ancient (the "Popiſh) religion could not be reſtored, without "danger of diſturbing the public peace; but that

then it follows, that the ſeparation of the Proteſtants from the Romiſh church is inſolent and ſchiſmatical. When that church attempted, by the power of her arrogated infalli-

" the maſs ſhould not be aboliſhed, nor the *Catho-*
" *lics* hindered from the free exerciſe of their reli-
" gion, nor any one of them allowed to embrace
" *Lutheraniſm*; that the *Sacramentarians* ſhould be
" baniſhed the empire; that the *Anabaptiſts* ſhould
" be puniſhed with death; and that no preachers
" ſhould explain the goſpel in any other ſenſe than
" what was approved by the CHURCH."

Againſt this decree, totally ſubverſive of the right of private judgement, ſix princes of the empire, together with fourteen free cities of Germany, entered their proteſt. Two things chiefly theſe excellent princes and cities proteſted againſt: 1. The reſtraint which was laid on, and the violence that was offered to the conſciences of men, by this arbitrary decree, by which it was ordained, that *no perſon ſhould change their religion, nor any* Catholics *be allowed to embrace* Lutheraniſm. The radical principle upon which their proteſt was founded, was, That the only rule of religion was the word of God; that it was the duty of every Chriſtian to judge of the ſenſe of it according to the light and convictions of his conſcience, to adhere ſtedfaſtly to the ſacred truths contained in it, and to renounce all principles and practices which appeared to him inconſiſtent with the dictates of the ſacred writings. Accordingly, in the beginning of their

infallibility, to enforce her unwieldy creed upon the firſt Proteſtants, they proteſted for this right, they pleaded it, and they pleaded it with ſucceſs. They pleaded it,

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their appeal, the princes "appealed, for themſelves "and their ſubjects, and for all who either then "did, or for the future ſhould, adhere to the holy "word of God; and declared, That they had no "other deſign but the honour of God, and his "moſt holy word, and to provide for their own and "others ſalvation; and that they neither intended "nor acted any thing but what they were fully con-"vinced they owed to their own conſciences, and "even to God himſelf." They clearly ſaw, that the edict of the diet at *Spires* ſubſtituted the church in the place of the Bible, and made the firſt the lord of the conſcience, inſtead of the laſt; and therefore, in order to preſerve their Chriſtian privileges, they proteſted for liberty to adhere to the holy word of God. 2. Another thing againſt which this proteſt was taken, was that part of the decree which enjoined miniſters and preachers not to explain the goſpel in any other ſenſe than what was approved by the church. As theſe two parts of this deteſtable edict buried the liberty, as well of the clergy as of the laity, in one common grave, theſe princes proteſted againſt both. It was this celebrated proteſt which gave riſe to the honourable name of *Proteſtant*; and thoſe only who adhere to the principles upon which it is founded deſerve the appellation. Upon the very ſame ground did our

Engliſh

I ſay, with ſucceſs: for it is well known, that this principle upon which they went, maintained with firmneſs, and purſued to its conſequences with perſeverance, ſhook that vaſt fabric which had employed ages to rear, and reduced it to that contemptible and inſignificant ſtate in which it now languiſhes.

In that right, then, which every man

Engliſh Reformers take their ſtand. They oppoſed the infallible authority of ſcripture to that of the church; and contended, that ſcripture, and not the church, was the judge in religious controverſies. Hence it is obvious, that the right of private judgement is the great baſis of the glorious Reformation, and the radical principle of the Proteſtant faith. Hence, too, it will be obvious, with what juſtice the penetrating and ingenious Mr Hume pronounces our Venerable Reformers to have been univerſally inflamed with the higheſt enthuſiaſm. If it is enthuſiaſm to repreſs the inroads of ſuperſtition, to aſſert the right of private judgement, to maintain, that the ſacred records are the only rule of faith and manners, in oppoſition to the claims of the church, and that every man has an unalienable right to judge of the ſenſe of ſcripture, according to the light of his own conſcience; — if this is enthuſiaſm, then the Reformers were enthuſiaſts indeed; and every philoſopher, every man of liberal ſentiments, will deem it his honour to range with ſuch enthuſiaſts.

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has to judge for himſelf in religious matters, does the eſſence of Chriſtian liberty conſiſt. This right is the glory of our bleſſed religion, — the legacy of Chriſt to every man, — the boaſt of Proteſtants; and the man who timidly ſacrifices it at the ſhrine of power, or tamely gives it up for the ſake of preferment, forfeits all title to the honourable name of *Proteſtant*.

It is not to be ſuppoſed, neither is it intended here to inſinuate, that this article contains all the invaluable branches of the Chriſtian's liberty. No: — for, beſides this, it implies in it, as the apoſtle obſerves, Rom. viii. 2. — a freedom from the law of ſin and death, from ſin in its guilt and power, and from death in its ſting; — a freedom from the ſpirit of bondage, Rom. viii. 15.; — a freedom of acceſs to God, Eph. ii. 18.; — and a freedom from the yoke of the law alluded to in our text. Theſe are the *internal* branches of the Chriſtian's liberty; this may properly be called the *external* one; which, as it is not perhaps ſo generally underſtood by the bulk of profeſſing Chriſtians, we choſe to ſelect it from amongſt others that might have

have been introduced here. —— I now proceed,

SECONDLY, To ſhow what may be ſuppoſed a violation or infringement of the Chriſtian's liberty.

1. The Chriſtian's liberty is violated and infringed, when one man preſumes to dictate or preſcribe to another in matters of religion.

We have already attempted to prove, that every man has an unalienable right to judge for himſelf in matters of religion. This right is ſecured and bequeathed to him by the great Head of the church. It follows, therefore, by natural conſequence, that if one man arrogates to himſelf a power of dictating to another, he encroaches upon his brother's right of private judgement, and violates that liberty wherewith Chriſt hath made him free. All men ſtand upon an equal footing in this reſpect: "And all ye are brethren," Matth. xxiii. 8. And if one man has a right from Chriſt to judge for himſelf, ſo has another, and ſo have all *. We therefore

* Some may object, — "But all men are not ca-

fore violate our brother's liberty, if we with-hold from him that right to judge for

" pable of exerciſing this right." Then they are not men; becauſe this right is competent to them as *rational*, and it is but juſt to allow it to them as *accountable* beings. —— But this objection, I apprehend, is founded upon a ſuppoſition, that there muſt be a public authoritative judge in religious matters. — And who is this judge? — " The " church."— What do you call *the church?* is it the body of the faithful? That is the very thing we mean when we ſay, that every member of the church has a right to judge for himſelf in matters of religion. But if by *the church* you mean, either the civil magiſtrate, who in ſome countries is the ſupreme head, or the clergy, then you make the magiſtrate the *Pope*, and the clergy the *Creed-makers*. See this objection refuted at full length in thoſe incomparable papers, intitled, The OLD WHIG, vol. 1. —— " But it will introduce a di- " verſity of opinions." — What then? If every man is " fully perſuaded in his own mind," his brother's opinions can never hurt him. In the apoſtolic age, when the right of private judgement was exerciſed by all, there was diverſity of opinions. What did the apoſtles do in this caſe? did they withdraw this right from the Chriſtian churches? did they warn them againſt it as the fruitful mother of error? did they invoke the powers in being to *confiſcate* their goods, impriſon their perſons, and inflict upon them all *civil pains and penalties?* —

for himſelf, which we claim to ourſelves.

Even the public teachers of religion, whether conſidered as individuals, or aſſociated together in their collective capaci-

No: — this warlike method of *extirpating* men, and their opinions, was left to more modern and more *enlightened* ages. They employed their ſpiritual weapons, argument and perſuaſion. With theſe they boldly attacked errors, clearly refuted them, and ſolemnly warned the churches againſt their baleful leaven and miſchievous influence.

"But it will deſtroy the *rights* of the church." — Has the church a right to rob men of their reaſon, and to raviſh from them thoſe privileges given them by the Creator, and recogniſed to them by the Redeemer? *Tell it not in Gath, &c.* —— "It "will annihilate the juriſdiction of the church." — Has the church a juriſdiction over mens conſciences? then ſhe is not like the apoſtles, a helper of their joy, but a lord over their faith. It will never deſtroy the lawful power or juriſdiction of the church, to employ our rational powers and faculties for the very purpoſes for which the Creator hath beſtowed them upon us. If any church claims a juriſdiction which enſlaves mens conſciences, and deſtroys the right of private judgement, it is an uſurped one, with which her Head never intruſted her; and therefore every Chriſtian, every friend to the common rights of mankind, will emulate another in crying, "Raze it, Raze it."

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ty, have no power of dominion over mens conſciences. St Paul himſelf diſclaims any ſuch authoritative power over conſcience as this: "Not for that we have "dominion over your faith, but are help-"ers of your joy," 2 Cor. i. 24. Add to this, that one man's dictating to another in religious matters, is not only a violation of his brother's ſacred right to judge for himſelf, but an arrogant invaſion of the prerogative of Chriſt. He, as head of the church, has the ſole power over the conſcience, and has reſerved to himſelf the right of preſcribing to men a rule of faith and manners; and, conſequently, if one man aſſumes that power over another, he ſupplants Jeſus Chriſt, ſubſtitutes himſelf in his place, and impiouſly invades the prerogative of the King of Zion.

2. Chriſtian liberty is infringed by denying the common rights of Chriſtians to ſuch as differ from us in circumſtantials, or in matters of "doubtful diſputation," though by their fruits they appear to be viſible ſaints.

This practice originates from the church of Rome. There the unnatural birth was brought forth; and we may judge of the

child by the parent. No ſooner did the Proteſtants begin to attack the Romiſh hierarchy, than that church levelled all her terrible artillery, fulminated a ſentence of excommunication againſt them; denied them the common rights of Chriſtians; and commanded, that no faith ſhould be kept with thoſe whom the infallible chair had pronounced heretics.

This practice is evidently a violation of Chriſtian liberty, and robs our brother of the right of private judgement, which we claim to ourſelves. It is injurious, I ſaid, to Chriſtian liberty, becauſe it makes a man's right to the ſacred rites of religion to depend, not upon his *fruits*, or viſible ſaintſhip, but on his perfect uniformity of ſentiment with ourſelves in every thing. — It robs our brother, I added, of his right of private judgement; for if I exerciſe that right for myſelf, and preſume to exclude from the ordinances of Chriſt all who differ from me in any circumſtantial, others may do the ſame to me; and the conſequence of all is, the deſtruction of our mutual liberty, and the entire annihilation of the communion of ſaints.

3. and laſtly, Chriſtian liberty is infringed,

ged, by perſecuting and withdrawing our brotherly love from thoſe who have not a perfect uniformity of ſentiment in every thing with ourſelves.

This practice likewiſe originated in the Romiſh church. After the Proteſtants formed a ſeparation from her, ſhe immediately pronounced them heretic; — a name which at that time called up every frightful idea, and was accompanied with the moſt dreadful conſequences. This is the native effect of bigotry, which generally operates much in the ſame way upon all who have had the misfortune to fall under the direful enchantments of this deteſted ſorcereſs. Bigotry leaves no room for the exerciſe of charity and brotherly love; becauſe, as it warps the intellectual, ſo it contracts the moral powers of the mind, and cruſhes in their firſt riſe the ſofteſt feelings of the human heart. Its noxious blaſts wither our Chriſtian love; and the poiſonous fangs of this *Hydra* benumb our affections. Though its hatred may at firſt have mens opinions for its object; yet by an eaſy and ſudden tranſition, that hatred is transferred to and reſts upon

upon their perſons, and then brotherly love is totally extinguiſhed.

Now this is not only a breach of the law of Chriſt, which commands us to love one another, and to do good unto all, but a violation of Chriſtian liberty; becauſe, if I perſecute my brother even with the tongue, becauſe he differs from me in leſſer matters; if I withdraw from him my Chriſtian love, and, if the power is in my hand, puniſh him with all civil pains and penalties; — he is cramped in the exerciſe of his Chriſtian liberty, and through my means innocently ſuffers, for doing — what? what I do myſelf, namely, exerciſing that liberty which Chriſt hath bequeathed to him. In a word, however much we ought to deteſt and oppoſe erroneous opinions, it is ſtill our duty to love the men.

THIRDLY, In purſuance of our method, I proceed to point out the weapons by which Chriſtian liberty ought to be defended.

1. It is not to be defended with the accurſed weapon of perſecution.

The

The divine religion of Jeſus of Nazareth cannot be defended but by weapons and means ſuited unto its genius and nature. It is ſpiritual in its nature; and therefore the weapons of its defence ſhould be ſpiritual alſo. Hence ſays the apoſtle, "For "the weapons of our warfare are not car- "nal, but mighty, through God, to the "pulling down of ſtrong holds *."

Perſecution, as it is a carnal weapon, ought never to be employed in the ſervice of Chriſt. He diſclaimed the ſervice of this weapon himſelf, when he refuſed, at the ſolicitation of two of the diſciples, to burn, by fire from heaven, the Samaritan city which rejected his word †. The ſword has always been the engine by which every ſpecies of falſe religion is propagated; but the amiable religion of Jeſus needs not, and therefore ſcorns, ſuch help. It is able to make its way, ſpite of all oppoſition, by the energy of its own evidence, and the attractive power of its own charms, when held forth to the mind in their native colours by the Holy Spirit. But not only does the reli-

* 2 Cor. x. 4. † Luke, ix. 54. 55.

gion

gion of Jeſus ſtand in no need of the weapon of perſecution to ſupport or propagate it, but it is irrational and unſcriptural to uſe it: —*Irrational*; for though it may force a man to be diſhoneſt, yet it can never make him believe what his judgement does not convince him is true: mens thoughts and opinions can neither be hanged, pilloried, whipped, nor burnt: —*Unſcriptural*; becauſe it robs a man of that right which Chriſt gives him to judge for himſelf, and invades Chriſt's prerogative to judge all men.

In a word, though our liberties, when threatened or attacked, may be lawfully defended by the ſword; yet the cauſe of Chriſt is not to be propagated in an offenſive way by this carnal weapon. —Therefore we obſerve, that,

2. Chriſtian liberty is to be defended by adhering to it ſtedfaſtly, in all its parts, and oppoſing all invaſions of it, by theſe truly ſpiritual weapons, argument and perſuaſion.

The religion of the goſpel is particularly addreſſed to the ſpiritual powers and faculties of the ſoul. Theſe are its great objects. It follows, therefore, that as ar-

gument and perſuaſion are calculated to impreſs and affect the powers of the mind, they are the proper weapons to be employed in the defence of our liberty, and the glorious cauſe of Chriſt. Perſecution, violence, and external force, can only affect the bodies of men, and their outward eſtates: it is argument and perſuaſion alone that can influence the mind. Accordingly we find, that theſe were the weapons our Redeemer himſelf employed in the defence and propagation of his religion, whilſt on earth. When an embaſſy, conſiſting of two diſciples, were ſent by John the Baptiſt, to inquire if he was the Meſſiah, or if they were to "look for "another," Chriſt refers them to the miracles which he had wrought, as an argument calculated to convince their underſtandings that he was a divine perſon. "Jeſus anſwered and ſaid unto them, Go "and ſhew John again thoſe things "which ye do hear and ſee: The blind "receive their ſight, and the lame walk, "the lepers are cleanſed, and the deaf "hear, the dead are raiſed up, and the "poor have the goſpel preached unto

" them *." Thus did our Lord addreſs himſelf to the judgements of men, and with the greateſt clearneſs lay before them the proofs of his divine miſſion ariſing from the accompliſhment of the Old-Teſtament prophecies in him, — the extraordinary nature of his miracles, — the heavenly tendency of his doctrines, — the ſpotleſs ſanctity of his life; and ſo, in the way of argument and perſuaſion, did he deal with the judgements and conſciences of men.

The very ſame track did his venerable apoſtles follow. They reſted the defence of their cauſe upon the truth of their Maſter's reſurrection. Of this important and leading fact they produced the evidence, and ſtated it with the greateſt clearneſs and perſpicuity, leaving the conſequences to God: and when another apoſtle was to be choſen to fill up the vacancy occaſioned by the perfidy and death of Judas, this was to be one of his qualifications, namely, that upon perſonal knowledge he could atteſt the truth of Chriſt's reſurrection, in common with the other eleven; and accordingly the election by lot fell upon Matthias; who,

* Matth. xi. 3. 4. 5.

as he had "companied with the a-
"poſtles all the time that the Lord Jeſus
"had gone in and out among them *,"
was able to lay before the people the evi-
dence of Chriſt's reſurrection, and ſo to
deal with them in the way of argument
and perſuaſion.

In imitation of theſe illuſtrious exam-
ples, let us, my Reverend Fathers and
Brethren, deal with men as rational crea-
tures. Let us defend our Chriſtian liber-
ty, and ſupport the intereſt of the Re-
deemer, by repreſenting his religion in
its primitive purity, native beauty, and
unadulterated ſimplicity; truſting, that
by the power of the Spirit of Truth,
through our inſtrumentality, bigotry ſhall,
like Dagon, fall before the ark of God;
and when it falls, ſure I am, every real
friend of Jeſus will chearfully celebrate its
funeral-rites, and ſubſcribe this its deſer-
ved epitaph, "Firm may the turf lie on
"its unhallowed head;" and pray,

"That ſuch a hateful monſter never may
"Obtain a reſurrection-day."

* See Acts, chap. 1.

It now remains to conclude this diſcourſe with a few remarks.

Firſt, From this ſubject we may juſtly conclude, that a right to judge for himſelf in matters of religion, is bequeathed to every man by the Head of the church.

The goſpel is addreſſed to every man as an individual, hence this right. As he is anſwerable to God at laſt in his perſonal capacity, ſo he has a right to judge for himſelf. It is the diſtinguiſhing characteriſtic of our holy religion, that it ſecures this right to every man. Herein it is diſtinguiſhed from all falſe religions that ever were, or at preſent are in the world. The Mahometan and Popiſh religions, never durſt indulge their reſpective votaries in this right; becauſe, as they have no internal evidence to confirm the underſtanding in the belief of their divinity, and no intrinſic excellency to captivate the heart, ſuch an indulgence as this would have at once checked the progreſs, and marred the ſucceſs, of theſe religions. Not ſo with the divine religion of Jeſus. It does not call in the aſſiſtance of the ſword to propagate its intereſt. It breathes no ſanguinary or intolerant ſpirit, but

preſents

preſents itſelf to the mind clothed in its native charms, and adorned with its celeſtial attire. Thus it makes its way to the heart, and thus it ſurmounts all oppoſition.

Secondly, From this ſubject we may infer, that no powers on earth have a right to raviſh from the Chriſtian this glorious privilege of judging for himſelf in matters of religion.

This privilege (as has been repeatedly obſerved) is bequeathed to us by Chriſt. Our right to it ariſes from his bequeſt. As the ſole head of his church, it is his indiſputable prerogative to inveſt his ſubjects with ſuch immunities as he thinks fit. It follows, therefore, that no earthly powers have authority to ſpoil the Chriſtian of any of his rights, or to curtail any of his privileges. As Chriſt himſelf, not any powers on earth, beſtowed upon the Chriſtian his privileges, they have no right to take them away. What they did not, could not give to the Chriſtian, they have no right to take from him. It is their province to interpoſe their authority to preſerve inviolate to him thoſe immunities with which the Redeemer has inveſted

veſted him. If an attempt to rob the Chriſtian of his unalienable rights is made by any powers on earth, it is by an uſurped authority, and implies an inſolent invaſion of the prerogative of the King of Zion.

Whilſt I make theſe remarks, let us at the ſame time be thankful, that the preſent powers, under God, and over us, have ſecured to us by law our religious rights and privileges; and that, under the auſpices of our preſent happy conſtitution, every man, unmoleſted, may "dwell under his vine, and under his fig-"tree *."

Laſtly,

* It is ſomewhat amuſing to an inquiſitive and philoſophic mind, to reflect on the fate which Chriſtian liberty ſhared in Britain under the various reigns ſince the Reformation. The daring and intrepid ſpirit of Henry VIII. emboldened him to throw off the yoke of the Pope's ſupremacy. But though he renounced the Pope, he retained Popery. Inveſted with the ſupremacy, he preſcribed a religious creed to his ſubjects, to ſave them the trouble of compoſing one for themſelves. He was the *Director*, as well as the Defender of their faith. Inſtead of Pope Clement VII. the church was then governed by Pope Henry VIII. of queen-killing memory.

Laſtly, Let us, my Brethren, in our reſpective capacities, zealouſly maintain our Chriſtian liberty, in oppoſition to the extremes of bigotry on the one hand, and licentiouſneſs on the other.

Theſe

mory. The Royal, but manly boy, Edward VI. reared the ſtructure of which his father had laid the foundation. Directed by the ſage counſels of Cranmer, the Reformation was eſtabliſhed, and Chriſtian liberty treated with greater lenity; though the fires which conſumed *Joan Bocher* and *Van Parre* are a proof, that the ſoil of England was rather too hot for this tender plant. Mary, of blood-thirſty memory, overturned what had been done by her father and brother, and, directed by the ſavage counſels of Gardiner and Bonner, baniſhed Chriſtian liberty by fire and faggot out of her dominions. In the arms of Eliſabeth, of maiden-memory, the Reformation found an aſylum; but let her eccleſiaſtical laws and the Puritans tell, whether Chriſtian liberty was nurſed up there too. No Bishop no King, the favourite maxim of her ſucceſſor, of witch-killing memory, will ſhow, what treatment Chriſtian liberty might expect from him. Though the different ſects of religioniſts enjoyed more peace and freedom in his reign than formerly; yet this was perhaps owing rather to his natural indolence and inactivity, than to any juſt ideas of the reaſonableneſs and advantages (even in a political ſenſe) of toleration. The lofty ideas of *prerogative*, early received from his father by Charles I. of prieſt-

ridden

Theſe extremes are equally hurtful to genuine Chriſtian liberty. Bigotry deſtroys it altogether; licentiouſneſs perverts it. The mercileſs arm of the one robs us of the thing itſelf; and the wanton hand of the other ſpoils us of its ſweet effects. The

ridden memory, unhappily induced him to enforce national uniformity by royal power; which, had it taken place, would have extinguiſhed Chriſtian liberty: but the monarch being brought to the block, liberty eſcaped. It was only in Oliver Cromwell that Chriſtian liberty found ſanctuary and protection. Imperfect as his *inſtrument of government* may appear, it protected Chriſtian liberty, and provided that no man ſhould be puniſhed on account of his conſcience. At the Reſtoration, the old game was played over again. Charles II. of covenant keeping memory, finding himſelf ſeated on his father's throne, proclaimed war againſt Chriſtian liberty, and, by attempting to eſtabliſh a national uniformity with the ſword, obliged it to ſeek ſhelter in private houſes, or in hills and in mountains. His brother, infatuated with his darling prerogative, and faſcinated with fondneſs of arbitrary power, furiouſly aſſailed Chriſtian liberty, by attempting to introduce Popery, a ſoil in which this delicate plant can never thrive; and, after he had exerciſed his *diſpenſing* power, to the ruin of the conſtitution, was obliged at laſt to *diſpenſe* with his crown, and to ſacrifice his kingdom to his *hobby-horſe*.

The firſt baniſhes it out of the world altogether; the ſecond makes it miſchievous in it. Let us therefore guard againſt theſe dangerous extremes. Whilſt we aſſert the reality of Chriſtian liberty, in oppoſition to the fierce and ſanguinary bigot, let it be our conſtant endeavour, to preſerve it from the fatal perverſions of licentiouſneſs. Whilſt bigotry, with the hand of an enemy, attacks our Chriſtian liberty, let us defend its reality; and whilſt licentiouſneſs carries it beyond its true bounds, let us aſſert its proper limits. Whilſt we cautiouſly ſteer our courſe betwixt theſe dan-

Thus Chriſtian liberty having undergone a ſtrange viciſſitude of fortune, and long weathered the ſtorm through various reigns, at length gained the ſhore at the Revolution. This was the æra, the glorious æra, when toleration received the ſanction of law, and Chriſtian liberty ſhone out in the bloom and vigour of health, under the auſpices of William and Mary, of immortal memory. Since that felicitating period, this happy iſle has enjoyed the ſweets of toleration, murmured at only by thoſe who reap the greateſt benefit from it, and who owe to it the free exerciſe of their religion: An inconſiſtency which ſtrongly marks the caprice of the human heart, and points out that baleful influence which wrong notions of the genius of Chriſt's kingdom has upon the minds of men.

gerous rocks, our Chriſtian liberty, that precious *depoſit* which Chriſt hath committed to us, will not ſuffer ſhipwreck on either.

To conclude: Let us, with fatherly care, and unwearied tenderneſs, rear and nurſe up this tender, but celeſtial plant; let us, with firmneſs and perſeverance, maintain our Chriſtian liberty, in oppoſition to the deſtructive ravages of Bigotry on the one hand, and the wanton perverſions of Licentiouſneſs on the other; and that the bleſſing of Heaven may crown with ſucceſs our endeavours in this way, is our fervent prayer to the Father of ſpirits, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. AMEN.

The END.